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Principals' Perception of Their Preparation for Administering Educational Programs for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

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Undoubtedly, the role of principals is changing. Factors such as the increased numbers of language minority students in the nation's schools, the resulting federal and state programs, and related community needs are prompting principals to become more aware of new challenges and the implications for education. To respond effectively to those new demands, principals and

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preparatory institutions must gather information from participants in the management of those factors.

Several authors (Chapa, 1977; Aguilar, 1979; Troike, 1983; Weller, 1985; Santiago, 1985; Batsis, 1987) agree that the principal is the key to a school's success and the key person behind the successful implementation of educational programs for LEP students. Finn (1987) concludes that "the principalship is probably the single most powerful fulcrum for improving school effectiveness" (p.22). Consequently, principals should collaborate with their staff to develop programs that meet the educational needs and strengths of LEP students.

Because of the variety and complexity of instructional programs provided for LEP students, principals need special training in order to guide LEP educational programs effectively. According to Acosta (1987) some efforts have been made by federal, state, and local agencies to provide training for bilingual instructional personnel; however, few programs exist for the preparation of bilingual administrators. Valverde (1978) points out that principals lack training in bilingual instruction. Goonen and Angulo (1984) agree that training for bilingual administrators is limited. In short, more research in this area is needed so that training programs for principals can be enhanced, thus enhancing the benefits LEP students can gain from school services.

The following research questions were investigated:

1. What level of skill and knowledge do principals perceive they possess for administering educational programs for LEP students?

2. What level of importance do principals attach to those skills and knowledge?

3. What skills and knowledge do principals administering LEP programs perceive as important that are not included in the questionnaire?

Methodology

Research Subjects

The subjects for this study were 134 Ohio school principals. The final return rate of the survey questionnaire was 50%, which according to Babbie (1973) is adequate since "at least 50% of rate responses is adequate for analysis and reporting" (p.165). The study was limited to principals who were administering educational programs for LEP students during the academic year 1989-1990. It was also limited to data that the Lau Center, the Ohio Department of Education, and the Ohio Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) had on record.

Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire (Appendix A) was the primary instrument for the collection of the data in this study. The questionnaire was organized into three sections. The first section contained the 27 key items which inquired about the principals' levels of skills and knowledge and their importance for administering LEP programs. Two five-point scales ranging from 1 to 5 were used to indicate respondents' answers.

The second section contained an open-ended question that sought more extended responses to the question of which other skills and knowledge are important for principals to possess. The third section contained four items regarding the respondents' demographic information such as the number of years each had been a principal, the number of years each had been involved in LEP programs, languages each spoke in addition to English, and the kinds of programs, approaches, and strategies used in their schools to meet educational needs and strengths of LEP students.

The survey questionnaire was constructed on the basis of documents developed by Aguilar (1979), Gue (1979), Valverde (1981), and Acosta (1987). As a part of the validation process, a panel of experts reviewed and verified the content of the items. In addition, the four principals from the panel reviewed and answered the survey questionnaire. Osterlind (1989) states that "a content-validation study usually seeks to establish a consensus of informed opinions about the degree of congruence between particular test items and specific descriptions of the content domain that is intended to be assessed by those items" (p.265). Moreover, reliability coefficients were determined for each one of the scales; "skills and knowledge" was = .9701, and for the scale "importance" was = .9663. A reliability coefficient of .97% means that 97% in test scores depends on true variance in the characteristic measured, and 4% depends on error variance. In fact, Anastasi (1988) indicates that "any reliability coefficient may be interpreted directly in terms of the percentages of score variance attributable to different sources " (p.126). The reliability coefficient reflects the extent to which a test is free of error variance (Borg & Gall, 1983).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data included both descriptive and inferential statistics. Means, frequencies, and percentages were used to indicate the levels of skill and knowledge as well as the importance of the 27 items. Wynne (1982) posits that

"the mean is the most widely employed and, in general, the most useful measure of central tendency" (p.45). Post-hoc analyses were also conducted on the data to determine whether or not skill and knowledge level and skill and knowledge importance were related variables.

Findings

The study involved principals' levels of skills and knowledge and their importance for administering educational programs for LEP students. The study investigated three research questions.

Table 1 presents data necessary to answer the first research question: What level of skill and knowledge do principals perceive they possess for administering educational programs for LEP students? Table 1 shows the respondents' ratings of their skill and knowledge in 27 items by frequencies (n), percentages (%), and mean scores (m). The percentages in Table 1 do not add up to 100% since the "Acceptable Level" was not included in the analysis; only the "High Level" and the "Minimum Level" were deemed necessary for the analysis of the data.

More than one-half of the respondents in this study reported having high levels of skill and knowledge in the following areas for administering educational programs for LEP students: "parental involvement in school" (61.3%), "evaluating LEP program staff" (59.3%), "supervising LEP program personnel" (53.8%) and "LEP parents' educational desires for their children" (53.1%). These four skills and knowledge correspond to items 25, 10, 7, and 22 respectively. The mean values of these items ranged from 3.45 to 3.69 (see Table 1).

More than one-third of the respondents also reported having minimum levels of skill and knowledge in "conducting LEP program needs assessment" (37.5%), "legal bases for LEP programs" (40.6%), "state bilingual and English as a second language credential endorsement requirements" (42.2%), "language of the target group(s)" (46.0%), and "bilingual test instruments" (53.1%). These topics correspond to items 18, 15, 17, 20, and 12 respectively. The mean values of these items ranged from 2.56 to 2.89 (see Table 1).

Table 2 presents data necessary to answer the second research question: What level of importance do principals attach to those skills and knowledge? Table 2 displays the principals' ratings of the importance of the 27 skills and knowledge by frequencies (n), percentages (%), and mean scores (m). As in Table 1, Table 2 does not display the "Acceptable Level," so percentages do not add up to 100%.

More than one-half of the respondents reported feeling that all items from the questionnaire were of high importance except for "types of LEP programs" (49.2%), "first and second language acquisition" (47.7%), "state bilingual and English as a second language credential endorsement requirements" (44.7%), "legal bases for LEP programs" (44.6%), and "rules and regulations for LEP programs" (43.7%). These five topics correspond to items 14, 11, 17, 15, and 16 respectively. The mean values of these items ranged from 3.37 to 3.48 (see Table 2).

More than one-fifth of the respondents also gave minimal importance to the items "legal bases for LEP programs" (23.1%), "rules and regulations for LEP programs" (20.3%), and "the language of the target group(s)" (20.3%). These topics correspond to items 15, 16, and 20 respectively. The mean values of these minimum level of importance items ranged from 3.37 to 3.42 (see Table 2).

Table 3 reveals data necessary to answer the third research question: What skills and knowledge do principals administering educational programs for LEP students perceive as important that are not included in the questionnaire? The information presented in table 3 illustrates the frequency distribution (n) of respondents' inclusion of items by percentages of the responses written to the open-ended question on the survey questionnaire.

Of the principal respondents, 21 principals (32.3%) offered additional skills and knowledge on the open-ended question on the survey questionnaire, and a few made some comments. Many of the respondents' answers were already included in the original 27 items. Nevertheless, these respondents emphasized the importance of "knowing how to work with diverse cultures" (12.3%) and "skill at working with teachers and the administration at large" (7.7%) as important skills and knowledge areas for serving LEP populations successfully. The other six additional areas were mentioned by a very small percentage of the respondents (1.5%-3.1%) (see Table 3).

Demographic Data

Table 4 presents demographic data from the 65 respondents included in the study.

The typical Ohio school principal administering educational programs for LEP students was described as one whose experience as a principal is between two to eight years (47.7%), and whose length of involvement with LEP programs was two to five years (50.8%). The majority of principals only spoke English (53.8%). Twenty principals (30.8%) spoke a second language, and ten

(15.4%) spoke a third language.

ESL programs (26.1%) and tutoring (29.2%) were the approaches or strategies most widely used by respondents in their school districts to meet educational needs and strengths of LEP students (see Table 4).

Post-hoc Analyses of the Data

Findings from the Post-hoc analyses suggested that there is a moderate relationship between skill and knowledge ability and skill and knowledge importance. The Correlation Coefficient Analysis indicated a positive correlation between the two variables (r=+.58800). Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (1988) have indicated that correlation coefficients which fall within the +.50 to +7.0 range can be said to indicate a moderate (average) degree of relationship between the two variables. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test results indicated highly significant differences (p=.0000). The overall conclusion from these post-hoc analyses is that there is only a moderate trend in the data for items that are rated as high in importance to be simultaneously rated as areas in which respondents are highly competent.

The researcher decided not to use hypotheses since this is a descriptive study in an area where we know little and need to provide baseline data from which persons in the field should do more research specifically looking at relationships among variables and cause and effect relationships.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions can be formulated:

1. The importance of being knowledgeable about the culture of the target group was verified by respondents on the open-ended section in the survey questionnaire, as it was in the studies by Lanier (1987) and Acosta (1987).

2. Most of the respondents in this study see themselves as competent in doing those things they have rated with high importance. Furthermore, the skill and knowledge areas with high importance ratings can be described as general administration which includes parental involvement in school, evaluating LEP program staff, supervising LEP program personnel, and LEP parents' educational desires for their children.

3. The more technical and specific skill and knowledge areas related to LEP programs are, the less principals know about them. Examples of this lack of skill and knowledge are in areas of bilingual test instruments, the language of the

target group(s), state bilingual/English as a second language credential endorsement requirements, legal bases for LEP programs, and conducting LEP program needs assessment.

4. Low level of skill and knowledge in some areas may occur because of the nonexistence of special requirements for Ohio school principals serving LEP populations or because of principals having only a few years of involvement with LEP programs.

5. The lack of knowledge on issues concerning LEP populations may have hindered the answering of the questionnaire. Also, the self-perception nature of the survey could have contributed to the low response rate. In other words, potential respondents may not have wished to reveal their lack of knowledge in some aspects of their work.

Final Statement

The LEP student population is growing and will continue to grow. In Ohio, alone, approximately 10,000 school-age children have limited proficiency in the English language. To surmount the obstacles that undermine the education of LEP students, principals should procure commitment from all the school related members to create an environment in which meeting the LEP students' needs is a high priority in the educational agenda.

The findings of this study, even though preliminary, could be used by state and local agencies, universities, and colleges as a guide to further exploration of the issues and development of stronger training programs for practitioners and future principals committed to improving the quality of educating LEP students.

In brief, there is much to be done to ascertain the principals' preparation for successfully administering educational programs for LEP students.

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Table 1. Principals' rating of their skill and knowledge levels in twenty-seven key areas

Description	High level		Minimum level		
	n	%	n	%	m
1 Philosophy and theories concerning programs for LEP students	24	35.9	11	16.9	3.29
2. Present and future goals of programs for LEP students	26	40	15	23.1	3.28
3. Teaching styles appropriate for LEP students	31	47.7	15	23.1	3.34
4. Cognitive learning styles of LEP students	24	36.9	24	21.5	3.22
5. Recruitment of LEP program staff	29	44.7	14	21.5	3.35
6. Bilingual counseling and advising staff	25	38.4	12	18.5	3.20
7. Supervising LEP program personnel	35	53.8	12	18.5	3.65
8. LEP program staff development	18	28.2	21	32.8	2.98
9. Planning the curriculum and program development for LEP students	25	39.1	21	32.8	3.02
10. Evaluating LEP program staff	38	59.3	9	14.1	3.69
11. First and second language acquisition	16	25	21	32.8	2.83
12. Bilingual test instruments	15	23.4	34	53.1	2.58
13. Bilingual educational material	18	28.6	21	33.3	3.00

14. Types of LEP programs	19	29.7	21	32.8	2.88
15. Legal bases for LEP programs	17	26.6	26	40.6	2.86
16. Rules and regulations for LEP programs	19	29.7	21	32.8	3.00
17. State bilingual and English as a second language credential endorsement requirements	17	26.6	27	42.2	2.80
18. Conducting LEP program needs assessment	20	31.3	24	37.5	2.89
19. Evaluating LEP programs	20	32.3	18	29.0	3.06
20. The language of the target group(s)	16	25.4	29	46.0	2.56
21. The culture of the target group(s)	29	45.3	19	29.7	3.27
22. LEP parents' educational desires for their children	34	53.1	9	14.1	3.45
23. Cross-cultural communication approaches	23	35.9	16	25.0	3.19
24. Facilitating involvement of LEP parents in community activities	25	39.1	16	25.0	3.25
25. Parental involvement in school	38	61.3	11	17.7	3.69
26. Establishing a LEP program parent-advisory group	26	30.6	20	31.3	3.29
27. How to plan and publicize special community and school events that involve LEP parents	30	46.9	14	21.9	3.45

Table 2. Principals' rating of the importance of twenty-seven key areas

	Description	High importance		Minimum importance		
		n	%	n	%	m
1	Philosophy and theories concerning programs for LEP students	40	61.5	9	13.8	3.77
2.	Present and future goals of programs for LEP students	44	67.7	4	6.1	3.97
3.	Teaching styles appropriate for LEP students	51	78.4	3	4.6	4.09
4.	Cognitive learning styles of LEP students	47	73.5	5	7.8	3.97
5.	Recruitment of LEP program staff	4.3	64.7	5	7.7	3.94
6.	Bilingual counseling and advising staff	38	58.4	3	4.6	3.75
7.	Supervising LEP program personnel	46	70.8	2	3.1	4.03
8.	LEP program staff development	47	72.3	5	7.7	3.98
9.	Planning the curriculum and program development for LEP students	48	73.8	6	9.2	4.03
10.	Evaluating LEP program staff	49	75.4	3	4.6	4.08
11.	First and second language acquisition	31	47.7	7	10.8	3.48
12.	Bilingual test instruments	34	52.3	12	18.5	3.48
13.	Bilingual educational material	38	58.5	8	12.3	3.71

14. Types of LEP programs	32	49.2	10	15.4	3.46
15. Legal bases for LEP programs	29	44.6	15	23.1	3.37
16. Rules and regulations for LEP programs	28	43.7	13	20.3	3.42
17. State bilingual/English as a second language credential endorsement requirements	29	44.7	10	15.4	3.43
18. Conducting LEP program needs assessment	35	53.8	7	10.8	3.57
19. Evaluating LEP programs	38	59.4	6	9.4	3.78
20. The language of the target group(s)	33	52.6	13	20.3	3.38
21. The culture of the target group(s)	46	70.7	4	6.1	3.97
22. LEP parents' educational desires for their children	47	72.3	1	1.5	4.08
23. Cross-cultural communication approaches	43	67.2	3	4.7	3.88
24. Facilitating involvement of LEP parents in community activities	39	60.9	4	6.3	3.80
25. Parental involvement in school	46	73.0	4	6.3	4.14
26. Establishing a LEP program parent-advisory group	39	60.9	8	12.5	3.69
27. How to plan and publicize special community and school events that involve LEP parents	38	59.4	5	7.8	3.83

Table 3. Additional Principals' Skills/Knowledge by Percentages

	n	%
1. Know how to work with diverse cultures	8	12.3
2. Skill at working with teachers and the administration at large	5	7.7
3. Good human relations skills	2	3.1
4. Knowledge of ways to communicate with LEP students and their parents	2	3.1
5. Understanding techniques for planning	1	1.5
6. Writing of proposals and grants for providing LEP student needs	1	1.5
7. How to involve community agencies	1	1.5
8. Skill to network at local and national levels	1	1.5

Table 4. *Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Information of Respondents*

Demographic Variable	n	%
Years as a principal		
One year or less	5	7.7
Two to eight years	31	47.7
Nine to fifteen years	16	24.6
Sixteen years or more	13	20.0
Years of involvement with LEP programs		
One year or less	6	9.2
Two to five years	33	50.8
Six to nine years	16	24.6
Ten years or more	10	15.4
Language spoken		
Only English	35	53.8
Second Language	20	30.8
Third Language	10	15.4
Programs serving LEP students		
ESL program	17	26.1
Bilingual instruction	7	10.8
Multicultural programs	5	7.7
Self-contained middle school program	2	3.1
Approaches and strategies serving LEP students		
Tutoring	19	29.2
ESL team	9	13.8
Coordination committees	9	13.8
Techniques to teach languages	10	15.4
Grade level meetings	1	1.5
Computer-assisted instruction	1	1.5

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Principal Questionnaire

Please indicate your level of skill/knowledge and its importance for each of the following items for administering educational programs for limited English proficient (LEP) students. Please think of each item as you apply it in educational programs for LEP students.

Please rate the level of skill/
knowledge according to the following code:

Please rate the level of importance
according to the following code:

1 = No Competence (NC)
2 = Minimal Competence (MC)
3 = Acceptable Competence (AC)
4 = Considerable Competence (CC)
5 = High Competence (HC)

1 = No Importance (NI)
2 = Minimal Importance (MI)
3 = Acceptable Importance (AI)
4 = Considerable Importance (CI)
5 = High Importance (HI)

Levels of skill or knowledge and their importance in the administration of LEP programs

	LEVEL					IMPORTANCE				
	NC	MC	AC	CC	HC	NI	MI	AI	CI	HI
1. Philosophy and theories concerning programs for LEP students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Present and future goals of programs for LEP students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	LEVEL					IMPORTANCE				
	NC	MC	AC	CC	HC	NI	MI	AI	CI	HI
3. Teaching styles appropriate for LEP students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4. Cognitive learning styles of LEP students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5. Recruitment of LEP programs staff	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6. Bilingual counseling/advising staff	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7. Supervising LEP program personnel	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8. LEP program staff development	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9. Planning the curriculum and program development for LEP students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10. Evaluating LEP program staff	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	LEVEL					IMPORTANCE				
	NC	MC	AC	CC	HC	NI	MI	AI	CI	HI
11. First and second language acquisition	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
12. Bilingual test instruments	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
13. Bilingual educational material	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
14. Types of LEP programs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
15. Legal bases for LEP programs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
16. Rules/regulations for LEP programs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
17. State bilingual/English as a second language credential endorsement requirements	1				5	1	2	3	4	5
18. Conducting LEP program needs assessment	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
19. Evaluating LEP programs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	LEVEL					IMPORTANCE				
	NC	MC	AC	CC	HC	NI	MI	AI	CI	HI
20. The language of the target group(s)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
21. The culture of the target group(s)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
22. LEP parents' educational desires for their children	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
23. Cross cultural communication approaches	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
24. Facilitating involvement of LEP	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25. Parental involvement in school	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
26. Establishing of a LEP program parent-advisory group	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
27. How to plan and publicize special community/school events that involve LEP parents	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Please list skills/knowledge you perceive as very important for principals in administering successful educational program for LEP students that are not included in the questionnaire.

Please answer each of the following questions:
1. Years as a principal _____
2. Years of involvement with LEP programs _____
3. List languages other than English that you speak _____
_____

4. List kinds of programs/approaches/strategies used in your building to meet educational needs and strengths of LEP students.
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for your cooperation